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XVII.—*Notice of migratory Birds which alighted on, or were seen from, H.M.S. Beacon, Capt. Graves, on the passage from Malta to the Morea at the end of April 1841.* By WM. THOMPSON, Esq., Vice-Pres. Nat. Hist. Society of Belfast.

HAVING been favoured by my friend Capt. Graves, R.N., with an invitation to accompany him during the projected government survey of the island of Candia, I, with Mr. E. Forbes (who had received from the Admiralty the honorary appointment of Naturalist on the occasion), left Malta in H.M.S. Beacon on the 21st of April. The first port we sailed for was Navarino, for the purpose of watering the ship. The passage occupied seven days. It being just the period of the year when many species of birds which make Europe their abode only in the more genial seasons, were, after having passed the winter in Africa, crossing the Mediterranean to their summer quarters, we were often gratified by a sight of them, either passing, resting briefly on the rigging, or remaining sometimes so long as a day or more about the ship.

The following notes were made upon the subject. The prevailing wind of the day is set down: the progress noted is what we had made at sunset.

*April 22.*—Wind W., forty miles E. of Malta. An Owl alighted on the vessel and remained a short time. I saw it very well and near, but could not be certain of its species. Looking over the collection at the British Museum and referring to Gould's 'Birds of Europe' since my return, have not satisfied me on the point. Other examples of the same species were seen on the passage, and afterwards in the island of Paros. It seems to be the most common of the small migratory owls to the south of Europe, and I have little doubt is the species noticed by Sibthorp in his papers on Greece (published in Walpole's Memoirs) as the *Strix passerina*.—Blue-headed Wagtail (*Motacilla neglecta*, Gould): two of these birds, both females, were about the vessel all day, and very tame; one of them flew into our cabin. It was amusing to see them fly-catching on the deck, where they appeared to great advantage, and met with considerable success. Their manner is, poking out the neck most ludicrously, opening

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wide the bill, and then—making the unerring dart at their victim\*.

Common Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*). Two remained some time about the ship, perching on the rigging, and hawking over the deck in pursuit of flies.

April 23.—Wind S.E., 80 miles from Malta, and 50 from Cape Passaro, the nearest land. A Lesser Grey-shrike (*Lanius minor*), of which I had a near view several times; a Whitethroat (*Sylvia cinerea*), a Willow-Wren (*Sylvia Trochilus*), and a Black-headed Bunting† (*Emberiza melanocephala*), flew on board. Two individuals of the *Motacilla neglecta* remained for some time in the vessel, as did a Wheatear (*Saxicola Cenanthe*) all day. A House Marten (*Hirundo urbica*) flew into the cabin and was found dead shortly afterwards: it had not met with any molestation on board. The officers of the Beacon have frequently known birds of different species when crossing the Mediterranean thus fly into the cabin, secrete themselves and die. A Quail (*Perdix Coturnix*) was captured on board, and appeared to be dying at the time.

April 24.—Wind S.E., 90 miles E. of Sicily: Syracuse the nearest land. Several of the *Motacilla neglecta* flew on board; one of them entered the cabin very boldly, and entertained us much by its familiarity. Persons passing in and out of the room frightened it not from fly-catching, in which it succeeded by running, leaping, or taking short flights at its prey: this bird even alighted on ourselves and picked flies off our clothes.

Two or three Hoopoes (*Upupa Epops*) came on board, rested for a short time, and proceeded on their flight; a Turtle Dove (*Columba Turtur*) did the same.

A flock consisting of twelve Ibises (*Ibis falcinellus*, Temm.) were seen first at a distance coming from the south-west, flew close past the vessel, and continued directly in the same course, or towards the north-east, until lost to view.

April 25.—Wind N.E., 58 miles from Calabria, the nearest land: 135 miles from Mount Etna at sunset, when it was visible. A Scops-eared Owl (*Strix Scops*) was knocked down and captured just as he had clutched a Lesser White-throat (*Sylvia Curruca*), of which species two or three individuals came on board. A Shrike (*Lanius* —), which from

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Two or three of the *Upupa Epops* and a *Columba Turtur* as yesterday flew on board, but did not remain long. "Large and small hawks" were reported to me as seen about the ship; but the Goatsucker and Cuckoo might, from their general appearance and mode of flight, be not improbably looked upon as "small hawks."

April 26.—Wind N.E., 86 miles from Zante, the nearest land: 130 miles from Navarino. A fine male Woodchat (*Lanius rufus*), a White-collared Flycatcher (*Muscicapa albicollis*), and one of Natterer's Warblers (*Sylvia Nattereri*) were caught on board.

A *Sylvia Trochilus* and a Chiff-chaff (*Sylvia rufa*) were found dead in my cabin; they had not been caught or injured in any way on board, and must, I think, have died from fatigue: want of food could hardly have caused their death, as there were plenty of flies in the cabin. A *Sylvia Curruca*, a Sub-alpine Warbler (*Curruca leucopogon*, Gould), a *Saxicola Enanthe*, a Whinchat (*Saxicola Rubetra*), a Pied Wheatear (*Saxicola leucomela*), and an *Alauda*, of the same species as noticed yesterday, flew on board, as did two or three individuals of *Motacilla neglecta*. Several of the *Hirundo rustica* about the vessel during the day, and some remained, perching on one of the boats, throughout the night. Three Bee-eaters (*Merops apiaster*) came from the south, and flew close past the ship without alighting. I saw four of the *Columba Turtur* come from the south today; two of them singly, the other two

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in company: one only alighted on the ship, and in the evening was caught when asleep.

April 27.—Wind N., 45 miles from Zante, the nearest land, and in sight: 60 miles W. of the Morea. A Kestrel (*Falco Tinnunculus*) flew close past the ship, and a “much larger hawk,” which did not come under my own observation, was stated to have been seen.

Two females of the *Oriolus Galbula* which flew on board were captured. Two or three males of the *Muscicapa albicollis* visited us today, and as many females either of this species or the Pied Flycatcher (*Muscicapa luctuosa*), but most probably the former.

A *Saxicola Rubetra* and a *Motacilla neglecta* came to the ship. About a dozen of the *Hirundo rustica*, which rested last night on the rigging, went off this morning. Throughout the afternoon and towards evening many more arrived, and continued flying about the ship in considerable numbers.

A few of the *Hirundo urbica* appeared this morning and remained through the early part of the day, confining their flight to the lee-side of the ship: in the afternoon still more were seen hawking about in company with *Hir. rustica*; as flies were numerous, they probably obtained plenty of food: at four o'clock P.M. all of this species were gone.

In the morning a *Merops apiaster*, coming from the southwest, alighted for a moment on the vessel and then flew towards Zante or in a north-east direction: soon afterwards a flock consisting of fifteen came from the same quarter, hawked about the leeward side of the vessel for a short time, and then proceeded north-east: an hour after their departure (ten o'clock) a flock of eight appeared, and alighting on a rope astern the ship, remained there for nearly an hour; they were perched close together, and so low down on the rope, that by its motion the lowest one was more than once ducked in the water, but nevertheless did not let go its hold or change its position for a drier one. These birds were but a few yards from the cabin-windows, and looked so extremely beautiful, that they were compared by some of the spectators to parquets, and on account of their gaudy plumage not very inaptly. After these left us, others were seen throughout the day, but generally singly; they rarely alighted: all flew in the same course\*.

A few Goatsuckers (*Caprimulgus Europæus*) appeared about the ship today and alighted; they were all single with one ex-

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ception, when two were seen in company. A few individuals of this species were likewise seen within the last two or three days. A couple were shot this afternoon. Throughout today the *Columba Turtur* was observed coming from the south, and generally singly: very few alighted.

All the birds seen on migration bore right on in the course they had come, whether they rested temporarily on the vessel or otherwise. They all came from a southerly direction, either due south, S.W. or S.E. The wind was moderate, the weather fine and dry during the whole passage, so that all the species we saw were in the ordinary course of migration, and none driven to the ship by any stress of weather.

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Although not coming within the title of this communication, inasmuch as it had already taken up its summer quarters, I shall here mention the Alpine Swift (*Cypselus melba*), which upon our entering the fine bay of Navarino on the morning of the 28th, appeared in great numbers careering high overhead. Of the *Hirundines* generally, it may be remarked, that from our arrival in France on the evening of the 1st of April, we did not see any of the species until the 9th, when going down the Rhone from Lyons to Avignon. About half-way between these places several of the *Cyp. melba* were seen flying over the river, and likewise at all suitable places from where they first appeared until we reached Avignon. *Hirundo rustica* and *H. urbica* were likewise seen several times between Lyons and Avignon, but were nowhere numerous. The first I saw of these species (but which of them could not be determined from the distance) was a small flock flying northwards, evidently on migration. All indeed which were seen today were I think only temporarily here, and would, after having got sufficient rest and food, move northwards. A very few Sand Martens (*Hirundo riparia*) were also seen about the Rhone today. At Malta, on the 17th of April, we first met with the Common Swift (*Cypselus murarius*), where, together with the three species of *Hirundo* just mentioned, numbers were flying low and in company, wherever we walked about the island; the day was very fine and warm: all four species were about as numerous as in their most favoured haunts in the British Islands.

On the 18th of April, when walking in the neighbourhood of Valetta (Malta), six Little Plovers (*Charadrius minor*) in a flock alighted very near us apparently to rest, and after a short time proceeded in their course, which was in a north-west direction.

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